

Edwards: Coble should resign panel leadership

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GREENSBORO, N.C. AP) - A North Carolina congressman's remarks supporting the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II suggest he isn't fit to lead a House subcommittee on homeland security, U.S. Sen. John Edwards said.

Edwards, a Democratic presidential candidate from North Carolina, said Tuesday in a written statement Tuesday that U.S. Rep. Howard Coble's remarks were "divisive" and "ill-informed."

"Someone who thinks it was OK for the United States to put innocent Americans behind barbed wire fences in 1942 should not make decisions about how to protect Americans in 2003," Edwards said in a written statement issued in response to a media inquiry. It was his first public comment on the situation.

Edwards' comments are the latest criticism Coble, a Greensboro Republican, has drawn since indicating on a Greensboro radio show Feb. 4 that Japanese-Americans were interned for their own safety. The Democratic National Committee last week called on Coble to resign his post as chairman of the House Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security subcommittee, which handles legislation governing domestic security and terrorism programs, drug-interdiction efforts and the federal prison system.

"We were at war. They (Japanese (Americans)- were an endangered species," Coble said during the radio show. "For many of these Japanese-Americans, it wasn't safe for them to be on the street."

He disagreed with a caller who said Arab-Americans should be confined.

Like most Arab-Americans today, Coble said, most Japanese-Americans during World War II were not America's enemies. Still, Coble said, Roosevelt had to consider the nation's security.

"Some probably were intent on doing harm to us," he said, "just as some of these Arab-Americans are probably intent on doing harm to us."

The remarks sparked protests from several minority groups. Criticism also came from three Asian-American congressmen, Reps. Mike Honda, D-Calif., Robert Matsui, D-Calif., and David Wu, D-Ore.

Coble issued a statement on Feb. 10 that apologized for his "choice of words." Coble's staff referred reporters to that statement Tuesday in response to Edwards' remarks.

Coble's chief of staff, Missy Branson, said Tuesday that she and Coble haven't discussed the possibility of his resigning the chairmanship. She said that she knows of no pressure from Republican congressional leaders for Coble to resign.

"He was wrong, and he ought to apologize," Edwards said. "As leaders, elected officials have an obligation not to divide, but to bring groups together. Leadership means thinking of American in terms of 'us,' not 'them.' Leadership means being committed every day to making equality a reality. It means learning from the past and making a better future for everyone. Representative Coble failed to lead."

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